STATE SENATOR

RICH ZIPPERER

Testimony of Senator Rich Zipperer in Support of Senate Joint Resolution 36

The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court is named in our state Constitution as the administrative head of the judicial system of our state. Currently, the Chief Justice is determined based solely on seniority. That is, the justice that has been on the Supreme Court the longest is automatically the Chief Justice.

Senate Joint Resolution 36 would allow the justices to elect the Chief Justice whenever a justice has been elected or re-elected and taken the oath of office. This ensures that the Chief Justice is elected or re-elected every time a new member joins the Court. The justice so elected may decline to serve as the Chief Justice, or may resign as Chief Justice at a later time while still remaining as a justice of the Court.

Our neighboring states employ similar processes. The Supreme Courts of Iowa, Illinois and Michigan all elect their own Chief Justices. Wisconsin's seniority system is rare, and nationwide less than 10 states employ such a process.

This legislation is about improving the efficiency and effectiveness of our courts, by ensuring that the administrative head of the judicial system in our state is chosen by a majority of the justices.